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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: EXPERTS BLAME ENGINE FAILURE FOR FATAL HELICOPTER CRASH

REF: PANAMA 445

This message is Sensitive But Unclassified. Please Handle Accordingly.

¶1. (SBU) Panama's Civil Aviation Authority (AAC) announced late June 2 that a failure of the no. 1 engine caused the May 29 SAN-100 helicopter crash that killed 11 people, including several top Chilean and Panamanian police officials (reftel). AAC Director Eustacio Fabrega told Econchief June 2 that a multi-national team composed of Panamanian, American (NTSB and FAA), Chilean, and Canadian investigators had reached this preliminary determination based on its initial review of the crash site and the helicopter's remains. He said there remained many further details yet to analyze, but that the entire team concurred in the findings. He added that the helicopter's Pratt & Whitney engines would be sent to the Canadian site of manufacture for further analysis. As the helicopter was reportedly designed to be able to fly on one engine, the investigators expect to evaluate whether the no. 2 engine had been sufficiently degraded to prevent it from maintaining full power.

¶2. (U) The press recently reported that the part of helicopter that controls the angle of principal rotor was advertised to be replaced on a government procurement website. The press speculated that this part and other deferred maintenance was the cause of the crash. The preliminary determination rules out this part as the cause of the accident.

¶3. (U) NTSB Senior Investigator Paul Cox praised the AAC's leadership of the investigation, noting that the team worked extremely well together in walking methodically through the evidence.

ARREAGA